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ABSTRACT

To determine the perceived needs among faculty for professional development, a survey was conducted of 165 faculty in 13 divisions. Questionnaires were returned by 129, or 78% with over 50% responding from each division. Among the results were the following: (1) the most widely used (93%) professional development resources, inservice sessions, was rated the least beneficial (mean rating of 2.55); (2) all other professional development activities supported by the college (conferences, post-graduate work, wellness program, sabbaticals, etc.) were perceived as beneficial but had high variance in utilization; (3) respondents reported low frequency of interaction with others as a resource for professional development; and (4) concerns were expressed about money, time and administrative support. Contains 12 references. (KM)

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DETERMINING FACULTY PERCEIVED NEEDS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: AN ACTION RESEARCH MODEL

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DETERMINING FACULTY PERCEIVED NEEDS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: AN ACTION RESEARCH MODEL

ABSTRACT

There is a feeling on many campuses of burnout and fatigue among faculty, a loss of vitality that weakens the quality of teaching. This paper describes how one institution applied action research techniques to determine the perceived professional development needs of its faculty and to design appropriate change strategies with organizational implications. The process created new learnings, new perspectives, and new approaches for an organizational response to faculty professional development.

DETERMINING FACULTY PERCEIVED NEEDS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: AN ACTION RESEARCH MODEL

> There has been a keen recognition that the competence of our staff is the point of departure for higher expectations for students and for enthusiasm in the learning and development process.
>
> College President

Introduction and Perspectives

In terms of enrollment, community colleges now are the largest sector of higher education in the United States. However the colleges face considerable challenge in the coming years related to scarce resources, changing student populations with less traditional motives, accelerated social change, and limited faculty mobility. At the same time there is a feeling on many campuses of burnout and fatigue among faculty, a loss of vitality that weakens the quality of teaching. Yet, the Commission on the Future of on Community Colleges (1988) has reaffirmed that teaching and learning remain the primary mission of community colleges, and that community colleges are learning communities. The heartbeat of the learning community is an energized, involved faculty.

This paper describes how one institution applied action research techniques to determine the perceived professional development needs of its faculty and to design appropriate change strategies with organizational implications. The process created new learnings, new perspectives, and new approaches for an organizational response to faculty professional development.

In the 1980's colleges have focused on revenue acquisition, new programs, marketing, student outcomes, and strategic planning, while issues of faculty professional development often have been over-looked as a way to strengthen institutional purpose. Nationally a number of variables have combined to create a professional development dilemma for many community college faculty and the institutions they serve. Faculty demographics reveal a highly stabilized middle to late middle-age profile with relatively little career change or development activity. The Commission on the Future of Community Colleges reports that the average full-time faculty member is 50 years of age and has taught 10 or more years. Within the next twelve years, approximately 40 percent of all community college faculty now teaching will retire. Further, community college teaching is somewhat restrictive in terms of rank, advancement, and variety of curriculum as set by two-year programs and lower-division college transfer work.

Compounding the age factor and limited opportunities for advancement is the tenure dilemma. Rice (1985) noted that as early as 1978 one half of all tenured faculty were under the age of forty, which suggests there would be limited infusion of new faculty for at least 15 years. Rice described dispirited faculty as an institutional problem of major proportions because academic institutions depend directly on a vital dynamic staff to accomplish educational missions. Also, specific surveys, studies, research, and informal speculation regarding faculty development concerns have resulted in repetitive themes and issues. Some of these are heavy faculty loads, lack of variety in teaching assignments, feelings of being "out of touch" with technical, career, and academic developments in chosen fields, and the impact of high-risk, poorly prepared students.

A key point in Rice's work is the framing of faculty development as an integrated component of total organizational effectiveness. Within such a framework, the faculty development issue lends itself to the application of organization development processes, including action research, gathering of valid information, diagnosis, feedback, identification of needed change, planned intervention, and evaluation.

The institution upon which this study was based is a two-year college founded in 1966 during an explosive growth phase of community colleges across the nation. After 22 years, demographics of the professional staff, in 1988, mirrored national patterns. Out of 194 faculty and administrators, 67 were eligible for retirement or were within five years of eligibility. Over 50 percent of the professional staff had been at the college fifteen or more years and 156 were tenured.

Similar to other institutions this college gave some attention to professional development in the late 1970's. However, the 1980's have been characterized by more emphasis on planning, marketing, student retention, and budget concerns. Finally through self-study processes, strategic planning, and renewed institutional interest in organizational effectiveness, concerns emerged about faculty development and vitality.

In a commitment to staff and organizational renewal, the institution determined to involve faculty members in expressing and identifying their perceived needs for development. Using action research techniques, a faculty team, assisted by an internal consultant, defined the research, designed the means of data gathering, interpreted responses, and recommended changes with organizational implications.

Literature Review

The literature abounds with conceptual and documented pieces about needed change related to faculty development. Increasingly, as noted by Bland and Schmitz (1988), the faculty development dilemma is linked to organizational mission and organizational effectiveness. The challenge to an educational institution is to understand and strengthen that linkage. Organization development theories and techniques for learning, for intervention, and for change strategies provide a way. Through applied organization development, an institution can come to understand the reality of such issues as faculty development within a specific organizational context and begin to design alternatives, implement, and evaluate the learning and change effort.

Argyris (1970) outlined organization intervention theory designed to strengthen a system's ability to understand its own reality, to implement change if necessary, and to learn principles for future effectiveness.

In order that organizational learning, autonomy, commitment, and ownership occur, Argyris (1970) recommended "organic research." This strategy was designed to create cooperative and collaborative relationships between the organization or client system and an interventionist. Members of the organization participate in definition of goals, instrument design, research methods, and change strategy.

Gaff (1975) emphasized the need for renewal in teaching and learning. He proposed three approaches: faculty development, instructional development, and organization development to create a more effective environment, improve interpersonal relationships, strengthen team and group functions, and create processes to support teaching and learning.

Gaff also encouraged affective development for faculty as a way of heightening self-awareness about personal assumptions, values, and beliefs. When Centra (1977) conducted a survey of faculty development practices, he found fewer than half of the 1,044 colleges responding said their institutions provided for counseling or other forms of personal development.

Tracing Ball State University's model program for academic planning and faculty development in the 1970's, Wurster and McCartney (1980; p. 15) noted that focus on development creates potential for "new congruence" between the values, goals and professional identity of individual faculty and the values, goals and basic mission of institutions. Finally, they saw faculty development as a means for educating faculty about planned change and participation in change.

Hammons (1979), a leading proponent of staff development in community colleges, indicated he did not wish to talk about staff development any longer if he could not include organizational development. He noted that staff members with new knowledge and skills were doomed to failure if institutions did not develop congruent policies, alter internal structures, and reduce competitiveness.

In his studies of organizational effectiveness in higher education, Cameron (1978) cited faculty employment satisfaction and professional development and quality of faculty as two of nine predictors.

Rice (1985) caught the flavor of the early 1980's in his little book, Faculty Lives: Vitality and Change, a study of the Northwest Area Foundation grants for faculty development 1979-84. In addition to describing the development projects, Rice identified some key issues for the future of faculty development. For one, he saw faculty vitality not as a peripheral issue, but central to institutional effectiveness. He observed

that faculty must be fully involved in the design and execution of renewal activities. The fact that the typical faculty member is over forty and plans little mobility, creates a new imperative for career planning, redirection, and more sensitive consideration of the interplay of personal and professional development.

Clark, Corcoran, and Lewis (1986) point out that much of the development work of the 1970's was designed by those who were not faculty members. Programs did not emerge from the faculty on the basis of felt needs and addressed only pieces of the faculty role, not the whole person, the whole career, or the faculty's relationship with the institution.

A worthwhile analysis of the evolution of faculty development along with future directions can be found in Eble and McKeachie's (1986) report on faculty development studies funded by the Bush Foundation throughout the 1980's. They set forth characteristics of successful faculty development programs and characteristics of less successful programs. Among other items, successful programs were characterized by high faculty involvement, feelings of ownership, increased colleague support, shared goals, and renewed commitment to teaching and learning. Successful programs stretched faculty to see beyond their own individual growth and to understand their impact on students and the institution.

METHODOLOGY

The need for considering an action research intervention at the college was identified through a variety of ways:

1. Discussions conducted in self-study sessions and requests for more professional development and faculty renewal recorded in the self-study document.

2. Discussions conducted in strategic planning sessions and requests for more professional development and faculty renewal recorded in the strategic planning document.
3. Corroboration of local faculty demographics with national reports lack of mobility, aging faculty, high number of tenured faculty, repetitive teaching assignments, lack of research opportunities, and unprepared students contributing to restlessness and burn-out.
4. General complaints about "stuckness" and "fatigue" generated in informal conversation.
5. Informal expressions of dissatisfaction with the college's annual inservice program.

An internal consultant, with support of the president, selected seven faculty members representing the various academic areas of the college. The team members assumed the mission of action research.

Through a series of collaborative meetings, the consultant and faculty development team proposed to seek, by way of a survey, verification of the current reality of faculty development within the organization. The purpose of the survey was to gather documented data about the faculty's perception of development within the organization, needs, and levels of current resources and organizational support. The desired outcome was valid information about faculty development processes, insights for improved problem-solving and a foundation for future work.

Members of the team designed six areas for questioning:

1. Demographics: Discipline area, gender, and duration of employment.
2. General: Satisfaction as an instructor and with professional climate of college.

3. Resources: Professional development activities used within the last three years and level of satisfaction with those activities.
4. Personal Responsibility: Perceptions of degree to which faculty can initiate their own development process and levels of satisfaction with the degree of initiation.
5. Contribution: Perceived contribution of professional development activities to effectiveness as an instructor and to personal growth.
6. Support: Perceptions of colleague and institutional support for professional development efforts and levels of satisfaction with that support.
7. Meaning: Narrative responses to the perceived meaning of "professional development" and personal accounts of what energizes and what drains the motivation for development.

All non-demographic items were rated on a five-point scale with one being low (e.g., very dissatisfied), five being high (e.g., very satisfied), and three being a "neutral" rating. A content analysis of the open-ended verbatim comments was conducted to identify basic themes.

Because length of employment was repeatedly cited in the literature as a dimension of faculty dissatisfaction, this variable was viewed as key to understanding response patterns. One way analysis of variance was performed on the rating scale items with length of employment as the independent variable.

Results of Faculty Development Survey

Surveys were distributed to 165 faculty in 13 different divisions of the college. Surveys were returned by 129 or 78 percent, with over 50 percent responding from each division. Fifty-one females and 77 males completed the survey. Nearly 50 percent (64) of the responding faculty had been at the college 15 or more years. Twenty-four had been employed 11-15 years, 19 had been with the college 6-10 years, and 22 were newer faculty with 1 to 5 years of service.

The survey included an inventory of possible professional development opportunities. Faculty was asked to identify which they had used in the last three years and to rate level of benefit. The most widely used (93 percent) professional development resource, inservice sessions, was rated the least beneficial (mean rating of 2.55). All other professional development resources supported by the college (conferences, post-graduate work, wellness program, sabbatical, etc.) were perceived as beneficial (mean ratings of 3.33 to 4.55), but exhibited high variance in utilization (10-90 percent). Comments related to these activities dealt with problems of insufficient available funds to support professional development, insufficient knowledge of how to secure and use resources, and perceptions of lack of encouragement and support.

Table 1 (page 11) summarizes the results for the remaining scale items and the analysis of variance results with length of tenure as the independent variable. The items are listed by the general categories outlined in the previous section (General Satisfaction, Personal Responsibility, Contribution of Professional Development and Support).

The three items measuring level of satisfaction as college instructors and the college's professional "climate" received healthy overall levels of satisfaction with newer faculty showing a significantly higher response at the "very satisfied" level. The subgroup members employed 15 or more years were less satisfied with their roles especially compared to when they first joined the college. These instructors were the "builders," the "pioneers," and the "charter members" of the organization with strong memories of "the good old days."

TABLE 1. Summary of Analysis of Variance Testing with Length of Tenure as the Independent Variable. (PDA = Professional Development Activities)

		N	Mean Rating	F Value
General				
Item 1	Satisfaction with role as a college instructor	127	4.00	3.22**
Item 2	Satisfied as an instructor compared to when first started	127	2.96	3.72*
Item 3	Professional climate at college one in which you can flourish	126	3.25	3.70**
Personal Responsibility				
Item 4	Degree colleagues from other divisions are a resource for PDA	127	2.55	1.72
Item 5	Opportunity to participate in designing own PDA	128	3.44	1.69
Item 6	Can initiate projects for PDA	126	3.23	.53
Contribution				
Item 7	PDA enhanced effectiveness as an instructor	127	3.18	.45
Item 8	PDA contributed to personal growth	125	4.01	.90
Support				
Item 9	Satisfied with resources to support your PDA	126	3.18	2.43
Item 10	College generally values PDA	126	3.60	3.44**
Item 11	College supportive of your PDA	126	3.96	4.98*
Item 12	Administrative supervision supports your PDA	126	4.05	3.90*
Item 13	Colleagues support your PDA	126	3.76	1.83
Item 14	You have been sufficiently recognized for your PDA	122	3.93	2.90**

NOTES

Ratings based on five-point scale from one, very dissatisfied, to five, very satisfied.

All tests based on four tenure groups, 1-5 years, 6-10, 11-15, and 15+ years (3 degrees of freedom).

* = significant at .05 level
** = significant at .01 level

The variance of response by length of tenure was a general pattern across all the items, but statistically significant only for the general satisfaction items and those items dealing with institutional and administrative support for professional development.

In exploring perceptions of personal responsibility in their own professional development, respondents indicated they did have, to some extent, opportunities to initiate their own development projects. However, it would appear to be a lonely process. Respondents in all subgroups reported low frequency of interaction with others as a resource for professional development (item #4).

Generally, faculty perceived strong and meaningful relationships between professional development and their instructional effectiveness and personal growth (items #7 and #8). These two items also revealed the least variance by length of tenure.

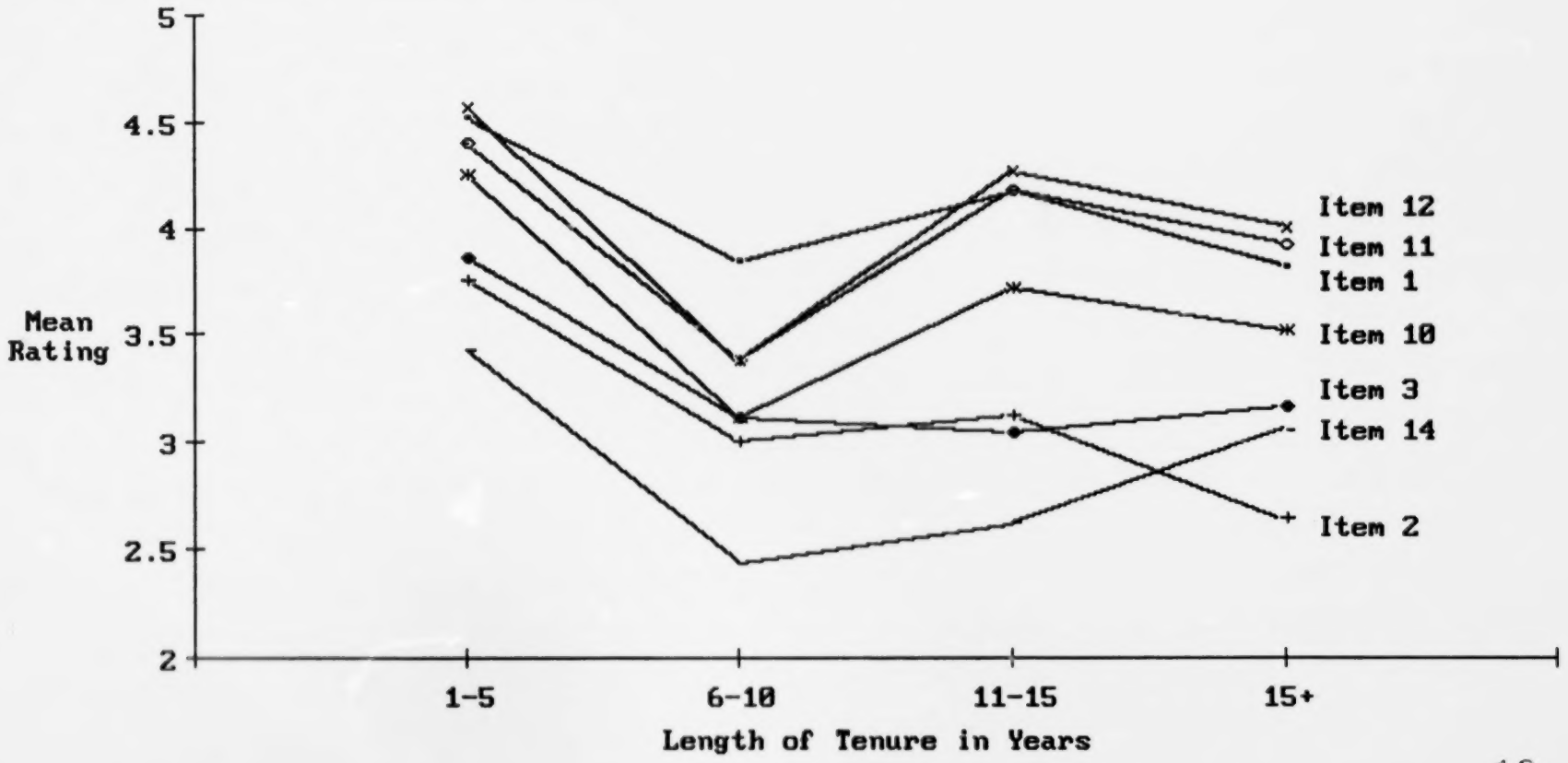
Respondents addressed perceptions of how their professional development was supported and valued (items #9-#14). Generally, responses to questions about college, colleague, and supervisor support for professional development were neutral to positive. However, the length of employment variable emerged as significant. The subgroup of faculty with 6-10 years of service, although generally positive, showed some significantly lower levels of satisfaction regarding value and support than other subgroups, particularly the newer faculty. The 6-10 year group did not have a strong perception that the college generally valued professional development. Nevertheless, eleven out of nineteen in that group acknowledged receiving some support or a lot of support from the college for their professional development. New faculty were particularly pleased with the perception of value and support from the college, administrators, and colleagues.

Administrative supervisors and colleagues were perceived by all subgroups as giving some support or a lot of support. In contrast, the verbatim comments were primarily from dissatisfied respondents. They were concerned about money, time, and administrative support.

Figure 1 (page 14) plots the mean ratings on selected items from Table 1 for each of the four subgroups as defined by length of tenure. The selected items are those dealing with general satisfaction with role as an instructor, and perception of institutional and administrative support for professional development (those items statistically significant in the analysis of variance). Except for item #2, satisfaction as instructor compared to when first started, the general pattern is for the 6-10 year group to be less satisfied than the other three groups. Levels of satisfaction appear to rise for the 11-16 year group and then generally drop off again for the 15+ years group.

If it is assumed that the same pattern depicted in Figure 1 would emerge if the same faculty were tracked over their entire careers, then it would appear that the "roller coaster" pattern is generational. The relatively high levels of satisfaction of the newer faculty would reflect high expectations, with the dramatic decline of the 6-10 year group reflecting the gap between expectations and reality. There would also appear to be a "rebound" effect as reflected in the findings for the 11-15 year group, but the levels do not return to those of the newer faculty.

FIGURE 1. Mean Ratings on Selected Items by Length of Tenure (see Table 1)



The survey concluded with four open-ended questions. Respondents were asked to comment on their perceived meaning of professional development, what it should be, what limits their development; what drains their energy, and what kinds of activities would be professionally refreshing.

Comments on the meaning of professional development focused on the importance of acquiring professional competence and highly specialized skills within specific disciplines, the importance of effectiveness in the classroom, and having credibility among other professionals. Respondents indicated that caring for psychic and physical well-being as a means of achieving spiritual renewal, energy, and a sense of personal and professional well-being was important to overall professional development.

In responding to perceived barriers to professional development, faculty clearly identified insufficient time and money as the dominant limiting and draining factors. Paperwork, meetings, and workloads were cited frequently as time-consuming and energy-draining activities. However, as respondents concluded the survey with perceptions of what would be most energizing and revitalizing to them as instructors, they said, most frequently, more professional and social interaction, more learning and growth opportunities.

In final analysis, five major themes emerged from the verbatim comments. Readings by the consultant, team members, and the institutional research director identified the themes. These themes then were used as units of analysis for coding. A total of 819 comments were coded.

1. General Perceptions: Comments were coded in terms of a general positive-negative attitude toward professional development activities. Results revealed moderate support and enthusiasm for professional development activities. There was a total of 509 relevant comments, 326 positive and 183 negative.

2. Social and Professional Contacts, Involvement, and Isolation: Comments were coded in terms of expressions of isolation and involvement. Of each of the themes, this was perhaps the most subjective. Comments were considered as indicating isolation if they expressed alienation, lack of support from colleagues, high priority of personal goals over institutional involvement, or perceptions of "politics" related to achieving professional development goals. Involvement was signaled by comments reflecting feelings of being accepted, and understood, receiving support from colleagues, satisfaction with role, interest in students, or knowledge and understanding of the institution. There was a total of 245 relevant comments; 185 indicated feelings of isolation, and 60 indicated states of involvement.

3. Perceptions of Management Support: Comments were coded by acknowledgment of management support or citations of lack of management support for professional development. There were 174 relevant comments. Forty cited presence of management support and 134 lack of management support. The content analysis did not reflect the positive perceptions of management support as noted in the rated responses. Comments apparently were primarily written by the dissatisfied.

4. Time Issues: Comments were coded in terms of responses related to time for professional activities. This included references to teaching loads, getting class coverage, paperwork, and other areas. There were 180 relevant comments; 176 indicated lack of time for professional activities, four made references to time that were not judgmental.

5. Money and Funding: Comments were coded in terms of responses related to availability of financial resources. There were 154 relevant comments; 23 indicated sufficient funding, and 131 indicated that sufficient funding was unavailable.

IMPLICATIONS

In conclusion, the intervention process revealed a number of general learnings about the Mt. Hood Community College faculty:

1. Faculty members do want to be the best they can be out of love for their discipline and commitment to students.
2. Faculty members yearn for an environment which supports pride in teaching and learning and professional achievement.
3. Faculty look to the organization environment to provide that support.
4. Faculty members value individual freedom and wish to have ownership of their professional destiny.
5. Faculty yearn for a sense of membership in rich, social, professional, teaching-learning communities.
6. Faculty members sustain their energy and vitality through a variety of experiences, and such vitality is not necessarily affected by age or duration of employment.

These learnings now can assist the institution in strengthening the environment as one in which faculty can "flourish" and contribute to total institutional vitality and student success.

Continuing the action research intervention model and the commitment to skill building and learning, the faculty development team received eight hours of training in focus group techniques in preparation for feedback-focus group sessions. Training included video feedback of simulated discussion. Using focus group techniques the team members discussed survey results with their colleagues. In particular they sought recommendations for strengthening the college's annual inservice program. A number of those recommendations were put in place in a subsequent annual professional development program which received positive evaluations. In addition professional development needs were integrated with the college's strategic planning process, reinforcing an organizational perspective and commitment.

On the basis of the experience of this project, action research intervention process can be an effective way to create the essential link between faculty development and vitality and organizational development for increased effectiveness. At the center of such an intervention are the principles of self-determination and freedom of choice. Therein beats the heart of the distinctly human energy and spirit which makes a teaching and learning community flourish.

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